

# Georgia flag causes flap in Albany

By SHANNON McCaffrey  
Associated Press Writer

ALBANY — The Georgia state flag was removed from New York's Capitol Monday after some lawmakers complained that the Confederate symbol it contains is offensive.

In a brief ceremony, Republican Gov. George Pataki said the flag contained a "symbol of hatred" for all Americans. He watched as Assemblyman Jeffrion Aubry, chairman of the state's Black and Puerto Rican Legislative Caucus climbed a ladder in the Capitol's cavernous Hall of Flags and took it down.

The Georgia flag had hung about 100 feet away from the governor's office at the Capitol for some 20 years, but had gone largely unnoticed until recent renovations to an adjoining room made the Hall of Flags more accessible. A group of black lawmakers complained to the governor late last week that they wanted the flag removed.

"I don't think you can sanitize history," said Aubry, a Queens Democrat. "I wouldn't want anybody to say that what went on in slavery and what went on in all of

the history in black America shouldn't be talked about. But this particular symbol is something I think we have a right to react to."

Georgia Gov. Zell Miller, a Democrat, mounted a push to get the Confederate symbol removed from the state flag in 1993, but the move was blocked by the Georgia legislature, his press secretary Rick Dent said Monday.

"But it is the state flag," Miller said in a statement Monday. "If this is the governor's biggest problem in New York I envy him." Georgia displays the New York flag and has no plans to remove it, Dent said.

The current Georgia state flag containing the starred "X" symbol of the Confederacy is based on an original flag from colonial days. It had been revamped into a red and white striped design in 1868 when Georgia applied to rejoin the Union following the Civil War.

But after the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in Brown vs. Board of Education, the all-white Georgia legislature in 1956 voted to reincorporate the Confederate symbol onto the flag.

## AROUND NEW YORK

### D'Amato urges city about penalizing Swiss banks

NEW YORK (AP) — The City Council should delay penalizing Swiss banks in the controversy over Holocaust victims' assets, but must continue to apply pressure to resolve the dispute, Sen. Alfonse D'Amato said Monday. Swiss banking officials, meanwhile, vowed not to allow "one penny" from a victim of Nazi oppression to remain in their vaults. D'Amato, appearing before a Council committee, spoke favorably about legislation that would prohibit the city from investing with Swiss banks until the compensation issue is settled. But for now the city should hold off from imposing sanctions, he said, pointing to ongoing investigations to locate assets and the creation of a fund to compensate victim's families. It is important for Swiss officials to be reminded, however, that the city could act at any time, he stressed.

### Couple murdered in their Forest Hills home

NEW YORK (AP) — A man was strangled with a cord and his wife shot to death early Monday during what police said was an apparent robbery attempt in their Forest Hills home. Officers were called to the Forest Hills home of Mikhail and Tania Portnoy around 3:30 a.m. by the couple's son, Yesim. Mikhail Portnoy, 70, was pronounced dead at the scene and his 66-year-old wife was pronounced dead on arrival at Booth Memorial Hospital. Yesim Portnoy, 43, was home at the time and was not injured, according to Officer Noreen Murray, a police spokeswoman. Police did not release any information on what, if anything, was taken from the couple's home.

### For the record

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**Dr. Donald Kasprzak announces the closing of his office practice in General Surgery as of April 8, 1997. If in need of medical record information, please call the office at 561-3430.**

I would like to thank my wonderful family, neighbors and many friends for the gifts, fruit baskets, cards & many, many prayers. I would like to thank the AuSable Forks Ambulance Crew for all of their help and the doctors and the staff at CVPH, especially the third floor. Also a special thanks for all the calls and personal visits since I have been home recovering from open heart surgery. Again, many thanks & God bless.

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Radio Flyer, makers of the original little red wagon, kicks off its 80th anniversary by presenting the world's largest Radio Flyer in New York's Madison Square Garden on Monday. The wagon, measuring 27 feet long and 21 feet high, will be on display at the International Toy Fair through Wednesday.

## Labor, safety concerns at toy fair

By RACHEL BECK  
AP Business Writer

NEW YORK — Dancing bananas in pajamas, a giant Radio Flyer wagon and a life-size Cat in the Hat joined in Monday's circus-like kickoff of the toy industry's annual product expo.

But the painted faces and intricate costumes couldn't mask concerns over toy safety and child labor that haunt toy makers and their trade groups.

Toy Fair, which runs through Feb. 17, started with all its usual hype as manufacturers used far-flung techniques to capture retail and media attention. Spotted in showrooms and on street corners were models dressed as blond Barbie, "Star Wars" action figures and the rock-group Kiss.

Industry officials also touted the 6.3 percent sales gain in toys and video games in 1996, according to the Toy Manufacturers of America, a New York-based trade group.

While all the hoopla helped deflect more trying issues, it hardly erased them.

Trouble continues to arise over toy safety. Manufacturers don't knowingly manufacture dangerous toys, but rather loose federal guidelines and scant government oversight sometimes allow harmful toys to reach the general marketplace.

In 1995, there were 21 reports of toy-related deaths, and 17 of the victims were under 5 years old, according to the federal Consumer Product Safety Commission in Washington.

Greenpeace on Monday demonstrated outside Toy Fair to protest the use of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) in children's products like bathtub and pool toys. They allege it can cause health hazards, including liver and kidney lesions and cancer.

Also plaguing the toy industry are concerns over child labor practices, especially outside the United States. While child labor is banned under the TMA's code of conduct, even industry officials concede it's tough to watch over.

## Trial opens; man accused of raping comatose woman

By BEN DOBBIN  
Associated Press Writer

ROCHESTER — Jury selection began Monday in the trial of a fired nurse's aide accused of raping a comatose woman. Doctors believe it is the first case of someone getting pregnant and giving birth in a chronic vegetative state.

Attorneys expect a jury to be chosen in two or three days. More than half of the 125 potential jurors were excused on the first

day of questioning, some because they had been swayed by pretrial publicity.

Jurors were questioned one by one in a room adjoining the trial courtroom because state Supreme Court Judge Donald Mark feared that someone might blurt out an opinion that could contaminate the entire jury pool.

John Horace, 53, is accused of raping the unidentified 29-year-old woman during a five-week stint at a nursing home in suburban Rochester. He was fired in

September 1995 for fondling a 49-year-old patient with multiple sclerosis.

The pregnancy was four months along before it was discovered. Severely injured in a car crash in 1985, the victim is unlikely to have had any awareness of the rape, pregnancy or birth, neurologists say.

The 11-month-old boy, born healthy but about two months prematurely last March, is being raised by his maternal grandmother.

## Prisoner death to be probed

By TIM WHITMIRE  
Associated Press Writer

NEW YORK — With autopsy results for a man who died in police custody inconclusive, police waited Monday for further tests and said the case would be referred to the Internal Affairs Bureau for a routine investigation.

Luftin Murrell, 27, died early Sunday at Kings County Hospital after an altercation with police officers and an Emergency Medical Services technician who were transporting him to a hospital for treatment, said Officer Noreen Murray, a police spokeswoman.

Having asked police at Brooklyn Central Booking to see a doctor, Murrell was still in a holding cell when he attacked an emergency medical technician and several police officers with a fire extinguisher, said Sgt. Cory Cuneo, another police spokesman.

Murrell, who apparently had been stabbed in a fight with his wife on Tuesday, was restrained by police and then taken to the hospital, Cuneo said.

He was alert in the ambulance, Murray and Cuneo said, but died sometime after arriving at the hospital.

Ellen Borakove, spokeswoman for the city Office of the Medical Examiner, said an autopsy did not reveal a conclusive cause of death for Murrell and that officials there were awaiting results of microscopic tissue studies and toxicological tests, which are expected to be completed within a week to 10 days.

One lieutenant and two police officers were injured in the fight; they were treated and released from Methodist Hospital, Murray said.

Cuneo said he did not know if Murrell suffered further injuries during the fight in the holding cell, but acknowledged he may have been injured while being subdued.

"He put three cops in the hospital," Cuneo said.

Murrell originally was arrested on Thursday at Woodhull Hospital, where he was being treated for wounds suffered in a fight two days earlier with his wife, Theresa Murrell, police said. The couple lived in the Highland Park section of Brooklyn.

Mrs. Murrell was arrested Tuesday and charged with second-degree assault and weapon possession. Luftin Murrell was charged with third-degree assault.

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